



July 5

**TRIVIA CHALLENGE:** When was an acorn top secret?

**TRIVIA ANSWER:** During World War II, all documents based on decryption of high-grade enemy cryptosystems were marked “ULTRA” to alert readers to the sensitive nature of the information. This was known as the “Codeword System.”

After the war, as the cryptologic partners continued to cooperate (they didn’t then have the term “five eyes,” but that in essence was what it was), they continued to use the Codeword System as one layer of protection around signals intelligence. But, they changed the codeword --- “ULTRA” became “CREAM” and it became customary to change the codeword annually. The codeword from August 1950 to July 1951 was “ACORN.”

Eventually, the cost of making annual codeword changes caused the partners to extend the period each was in effect. Each codeword change required new pre-printed forms to be procured and distributed worldwide and many thousands of rubber stamps with the new codeword had to be procured. In pre-computer days, large stacks of classified documents had to be stamped top and bottom with the codeword --- an activity known as “NSA P/T.”

The last codeword was UMBRA, adopted in 1968, after its predecessor was compromised with the capture of the USS *Pueblo*. The Codeword System was abolished in 1997 and a new method of classification marking was adopted.